United Nations E/CN.3/2017/21

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 December 2016

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Forty-eighth session
7-10 March 2017
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Items for information: health statistics

Report of the World Health Organization on health statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the World Health Organization, which outlines current work on health statistics in relation to the global monitoring of the health and health-related Sustainable Development Goals, the International Classification of Diseases and its normative work. The report also includes an update on the work being carried out to strengthen country health information systems, including the newly established Health Data Collaborative.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2017/1.

16-22163 (E) 221216

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Report of the World Health Organization on health statistics

I. General update on health statistical work

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) published global, regional and country health estimates as well as data reported by Member States on a set of core health indicators in its annual report entitled *World Health Statistics* at the time of the sixty-ninth session of the World Health Assembly, held in 2016. The report was focused on the health and health-related Sustainable Development Goals targets and potential indicators put forward by the Statistical Commission. The six WHO regional offices published statistical updates to inform the annual meetings of the regional commissions. In addition, specific WHO programmes and collaborating organizations published updated estimates of trends in key indicators as part of global reports, including those on tuberculosis, malaria, HIV and diabetes.

2. In 2016, the estimated causes of death patterns in childhood were updated, in collaboration with academic institutions and expert groups. WHO also updated its life expectancy estimates in *World Health Statistics 2016*. At the end of 2016, WHO released updated estimates of deaths by cause, age and sex for the world, regions and countries for the years 2000-2015. All data were disseminated through the WHO global and regional health observatories, which provide country data for more than 1,000 health data indicators.

3. The results of a WHO-led global effort to produce Guidelines for Accurate and Transparent Health Estimates Reporting (GATHER) were published in multiple leading academic journals and by WHO. In addition to the implementation of GATHER, WHO continues to consult its member States on new health estimates. This involves a two- to three-month process of interaction in which all input data, methods and results are shared with Member State focal points (through e-mail), who typically work in the Ministry of Health and often provide additional data sources and other statistical inputs.

II. Monitoring the health and health-related Sustainable Development Goals

4. WHO provided substantial inputs into the work done by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators of the Statistical Commission. This included providing proposals for the most suitable indicators, the metadata for the selected indicators, data for the 2016 report prepared by the Statistics Division, and proposals for the further development of indicators identified as "tier III" by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group. The latter include the indicators on essential service coverage and financial protection for target 3.8, which is considered the target underpinning all other health and health-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals by WHO.

5. As requested by the World Health Assembly, WHO will report at least once every two years on progress made towards the achievement of the health and health-related Sustainable Development Goals, through the World Health Statistics and Global Health Observatory. A special web portal for the Goals has been developed.

6. Monitoring the health and health-related Sustainable Development Goals presents major challenges for many countries. Health statistical capacity is still weak in many countries, and the increased demand for disaggregated data will further expose that weakness. Links between the health sector and statistical offices need to be improved and institutionalized, going well beyond the collaboration related to, for example, a national demographic and health survey or census module. In particular, institutional capacity for analysis is inadequate and needs to be enhanced in Ministries of Health, public health institutions and statistical offices.

7. The health sector can play a greater role in strengthening country statistical systems than it has to date. The Health Data Collaborative was launched in March 2016 during the forty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission, on the basis of a common diagnosis of a widespread challenge: global and country investments in strengthening country health information systems need to become more efficient in order to meet the demands related to monitoring the health and health-related Sustainable Development Goals and to contribute to the sustainable development of national statistical systems.

8. The Health Data Collaborative is now operational, with 35 partners and more than 300 technical experts engaged in technical working groups. In its resolution WHA69.11, adopted on 28 May 2016, the World Health Assembly referred to the Health Data Collaborative as a key platform for strengthening national statistical capacity at all levels. There is a growing demand for such capacity in countries that are engaging in the collaborative approach. For example, Kenya launched its own health data collaborative in May to bring development partners together around national priorities. Malawi, Namibia and Nigeria are on a similar path. Stronger collaboration between the health sector and national statistical offices is essential.

III. Classifications

9. WHO is undertaking the revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) through a systematic process, now planning a release for implementation in 2018.

10. ICD is the foundation for health statistics, in particular mortality and morbidity statistics. In recent decades, it has also been used for diagnostics, patient safety and quality, administrative purposes and research. All 194 WHO Member States have committed to reporting their statistics to WHO using the Classification, which provides a common language for comparable statistics. In line with requests by Member States, the eleventh revision of ICD (ICD-11) is being prepared, incorporating the scientific advances in the health sciences and issues identified in the use of ICD-10 since 1990. In addition, ICD-11 is designed to link with computerized health information systems and standard terminologies (i.e., direct use of standard terminologies and other health informatics applications) in order to be "electronic health application ready".

11. In 2015, the report of an independent external review of the overall revision process resulted in the establishment of a task force on mortality and morbidity statistics, which includes representatives of the national statistical offices of several countries. The task force focuses on the continuity of the use of mortality public

health statistics and, to a lesser extent, morbidity statistics, to minimize the effects of a transition from ICD-10 to ICD-11 on statistics.

12. WHO organized a revision conference in Tokyo in October 2016, with representation of Ministries of Health, WHO collaborating centres, academia and civil society. At the conference, ICD 2016 for Member State comments was released for testing and review. The importance of continuity in the generation of mortality statistics was stressed, including the ability to use electronic coding tools. The main work to be carried out in 2017 will involve quality assurance in the field, the incorporation of proposals and feedback from Member States and structural editing. Targeted release for implementation by Member States is planned for the first half of 2018. It is expected that Member States will use the 2018 version to develop detailed transition plans in order to begin implementing the 11th revision of ICD in subsequent years.

13. WHO has supported the development of the International Classification of Health Interventions (ICHI) since 2007. ICHI covers all parts of the health system and contains a wide range of new material not found in national classifications. ICHI currently exists in an alpha version. A beta version is planned for mid-2017, with completion planned in 2019.

14. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health was designed to report the different dimensions of functioning of an individual in a structured fashion in different settings and health sectors to study health, health-related states, outcomes and determinants and provide a common language for comparisons in and in between countries. Currently, issues arising from daily use of the Classification are being resolved.

15. In addition, WHO developed and promoted tools for improving cause-of-death information in countries with poorly functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems. A simplified list of causes of death for use in hospitals, based on ICD-10, is being used to improve coding and reporting practices in hospitals. Several training workshops were conducted in the African region. In addition, the WHO standard verbal autopsy instrument was revised on the basis of field testing, and the final 2016 version was released.

IV. Other normative work

16. WHO published an update of the global reference list of 100 core health indicators. These original indicators were developed after an extensive consultation process in 2014. An increasing number of countries are making extensive use of the reference list. The core health indicators include all health indicators proposed for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

17. WHO developed and published a standardized data quality assessment tool that is now integrated with electronic country health facility data reporting systems. The tool allows the identification of missing, inconsistent and inaccurate values and is intended to be used at the local and national levels in Ministries of Health. Work on standardizing health facility surveys and procedures for health facility data analysis with respect to core indicators is ongoing.

18. The WHO Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE), supported by the National Institute on Ageing of the National Institutes of Health of the United States of America and other country institutions, is a six-country longitudinal study with nationally representative cohorts of persons aged 50 years and older to study health and health-related outcomes and their determinants. Five of the six countries implemented a second wave of the survey, with a third wave planned for 2017. In addition, two local sites in sub-Saharan Africa implemented the third wave of a study to follow up on older people living with HIV.

19. The WHO model disability survey has been implemented in two national samples, in Chile and Sri Lanka. Reports from those surveys will be published in 2017. Another national survey is being completed in the Philippines, with additional surveys planned in Costa Rica, Oman, Panama and the Emirate of Dubai for 2017. A short version of the model disability survey has been developed following expert consultation on and analysis of the national implementations. It can be integrated into other multi-topic or stand-alone surveys that are not specialized health surveys.

20. WHO, in partnership with the International Household Survey Network (IHSN) and others, is developing standardized modules for the collection of data in household health surveys. Short and long versions of these modules are being developed on the basis of current best practice. The modules are intended to cover the global reference list of core health indicators, including those for monitoring the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as universal health coverage. Once finalized, they will be incorporated into the question bank of IHSN and disseminated by WHO. The Survey Solutions tool of the World Bank will then be used to build the questionnaire for implementation in a computer application, depending on specific needs. A version of such a survey using the modules, focused on measuring progress towards universal health coverage, has been completed in Tunisia in 2016; its results will be available in 2017.

V. Action required by the Statistical Commission

21. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the present report.

United Nations E/CN.3/2017/22

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 December 2016

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Forty-eighth session
7-10 March 2017
Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda*
Items for information: education statistics

Report of the Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on education statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on education statistics. The report provides information on recent developments in international education statistics, in particular in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2017/1.

16-21761 (E) 191216

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Report of the Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on education statistics

I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to a request made by the Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session, held in 2016, addresses six items: (a) the implementation of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 and the revision of ISCED fields of education and training (ISCED-F); (b) the global and regional education surveys; (c) the development of new statistical methodologies and standards; (d) global and thematic indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 4; (e) the Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicators based on household surveys; and (f) the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning. The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

II. Implementation of the International Standard Classification of Education 2011 and revision of the International Standard Classification of Education fields of education and training

2. Following the adoption of the 2011 revision of ISCED and the 2013 revision of ISCED-F, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and its education data collection partners, Eurostat and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), adapted their education survey instruments to the new standards. The 2011 revision of levels of education and educational attainment was implemented in the 2014 round of surveys on education and educational attainment. The new classification for fields of education and training was introduced in the 2016 round of education surveys.

3. Both revisions were developed under the guidance of technical advisory panels of experts in education statistics and classifications, including regional representatives, and were the subject of global consultations by all countries before their adoption by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2011 and 2013, respectively. Both revisions benefitted from the advice of specialists of the Expert Group on International Statistical Classifications.

4. In the two years between the adoption of the revisions and their implementation in international education surveys, training in the new classifications was provided to countries by the Institute through regional workshops organized on a biennial basis for developing regions. Eurostat and OECD provided similar training for their respective member States and partner countries. In addition, the Institute's network of regional and statistical advisers based in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean provided direct in-country support, as requested, as part of their regular work with countries. Both classifications are available in the six official languages of the United Nations: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

5. The Institute, Eurostat and OECD worked jointly on an operational manual for ISCED 2011, which was published in early 2015 in English, French and Spanish. Later that year, a document containing detailed field descriptions and correspondence tables between ISCED-F and previous classifications of fields of education was published online. Owing to the technical nature of the field descriptions, that document is currently available in English only.

6. In addition to the technical documents supporting the implementation of the revisions, the Institute and its education data collection partners have worked with countries to produce comparisons, or "mappings", of national education programmes and qualifications to ISCED 2011 to assist data users in interpreting the new education indicators. As of the end of 2016, more than 150 mappings had been published on the Institute's website.

7. The vast majority of countries have made good progress in implementing ISCED 2011 in their international reporting of education and education attainment data, with many reporting ISCED 2011-compliant data for the third time in 2016. Since 2016 is the first year of implementation of ISCED-F, it is too early to draw conclusions; however, the evidence so far appears positive, and there have been relatively few questions from countries on the use of the classification.

III. Global and regional education surveys

8. In 2016, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics education data collection was composed of the following 10 elements:

(a) Seven core education questionnaires administered globally and collecting data on the following themes:

(i) Students and teachers for ISCED levels 0-4;

(ii) Educational expenditure for ISCED levels 0-8;

(iii) Students and teachers for ISCED levels 5-8;

(iv) National education systems;

(v) Involvement in the development, processing and dissemination of the UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat (UOE) survey of formal education;

(vi) Literacy;

(vii) Educational attainment;

(b) One global supplementary survey on teacher characteristics and working conditions;

(c) Two regional modules:

(i) School resources in Africa;

(ii) Teacher recruitment and deployment at the subnational level in Asia.

9. Compared with the Institute's previous report to the Statistical Commission in 2013, the main changes in the content and format of the Institute's education survey were:

(a) The implementation in 2014 of the 2011 revision of ISCED and the implementation in 2016 of the ISCED-F classification;

(b) The format of questionnaires changed from PDF to Excel with the use of Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) in 2014;

(c) The content of core questionnaires described above was revised to extend the scope of the survey to cover formal adult education. As part of a redesign process, new variables were added, while others (with very low response rates or low relevance) were removed to streamline the survey design and reduce the burden on respondents;

(d) The global and regional teachers' modules were introduced in 2015;

(e) A global survey on instructional time was introduced in 2013, implemented for two waves and then replaced by the global teachers module in 2015.

10. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics is reviewing its education surveys to align them with the need to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (in particular the goal for education, Goal 4). As a result of that review, some regionally based surveys (e.g., school infrastructure in Africa) which include relevant variables for monitoring Goal 4, will become part of the global survey. The new Institute data collection based on the review will be launched in 2017. The Institute will lead the review and collaborate with relevant international organizations, including its education data collection partners, OECD and Eurostat. The priorities for the Institute in the coming years will be the improvement of the quality of data collected through its surveys and to support countries, especially those with limited statistical capacity, in improving their abilities to collect and report data. Priorities also include the establishment of data compilation and reporting mechanisms that will promote data use at the national level and improve data reporting at the international level, while reducing the reporting burden on countries. To inform that approach, the Institute has already conducted a thorough profile analysis of country non-response and is reviewing strategies to support national statistical capacity-building.

D. Development of new statistical methodologies and standards

11. To improve the quality and use of financial statistics on education, the Institute, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and IIEP Pôle de Dakar have pooled their expertise to address the issue of educational expenditure statistics, based on the use of national accounts techniques, building on the theoretical framework of satellite accounts. The result of that collaborative work was the development and publication in mid-2016 of a national education accounts methodological guide elaborated on the principles of existing international standards such as the System of National Accounts 2008 (2008 SNA) and ISCED 2011, and building on previous experience in that area. A national education accounts exercise is a comprehensive education finance data collection, processing and analysis exercise that covers all education levels, from pre-primary to tertiary education, including vocational training. It includes all sources of funding (all levels of government, private and external sources) and all types of education providers,

whether public or private. It serves as a logical and systematic framework for the analysis of education financing flows.

12. Strong technical coordination continues between the Institute and the other major producers of cross-national education data and statistics, namely Eurostat and OECD, in developing SDMX. In the near future, that collaboration will focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of data collection and exchanges, with a special emphasis on establishing a broader range of web-based data collections.

13. Key objectives related to Institute data collections in 2017 include:

(a) Publishing a global education data structure definition for the collection of international education statistics;

(b) Introducing online questionnaires as a means of reducing burden and increasing response rates and coverage;

(c) Establishing and implementing a resourcing strategy to support continual improvement and updating of software to meet the rapidly evolving needs of the statistical work programme.

IV. Global and thematic indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 4

14. To lead the development and implementation of thematic indicators for education, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the UNESCO Division for Education 2030 Support and Coordination convened the Technical Cooperation Group on Sustainable Development Goal 4 — Education 2030 Indicators in May 2016. The Group provides a platform to discuss and develop the indicators used to monitor targets in an inclusive and transparent manner. It provides recommendations to the Institute on the actions needed to improve data availability and on the development of methodologies to produce thematic indicators for the follow-up and review of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The Group includes experts from 28 member States, international partners (OECD, UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank) and civil society (Education International and the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All) and the Co-Chair of the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee.

15. Based on the recommendations of the Technical Advisory Group on Post-2015 Indicators, established by UNESCO in March 2014, the Education 2030 Framework for Action proposed 43 thematic indicators, which included the 11 global monitoring indicators determined by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators of the Statistical Commission. While each global indicator focuses on the outcomes of a target for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (such as the percentage of children meeting a minimum proficiency level in reading), the broader set of thematic indicators is designed to cover the wider agenda and factors that should be addressed in order to achieve each target. The Technical Advisory Group completed its work at the end of 2015 following the adoption of the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

16. The Technical Cooperation Group on Sustainable Development Goal 4 — Education 2030 Indicators met in October 2016 and agreed on a set of 29 indicators, 18 thematic and 11 global, for reporting in 2017. The remaining 14 thematic indicators were identified as requiring further developmental work, which will be addressed by new working groups of the Technical Cooperation Group in 2017. In addition, eight of the indicators (most of them global) for reporting in 2017 will require some further developmental work. More details on the meeting can be found on the website of the Group (see http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/resultoftcgmeeting.php).

17. Technical Cooperation Group is establishing several working groups, each chaired by a member State. The first working group will strategize on how best to address the methodological and availability issues related to those indicators that require further development. The second working group will establish guidelines for reporting data related to Sustainable Development Goal 4 for countries and international agencies, which aligns with the role of the Institute as the nexus for national and international education data. The third working group will identify issues of capacity in reporting specific indicators and develop tools and resources so that countries can understand data requirements, potential data sources and calculation methods. That working group will elaborate a mechanism to help countries develop their own national strategies for the development of education statistics. Finally, members of the Technical Cooperation Group were encouraged to join Global Alliance to Monitor Learning task forces related to indicators on learning outcomes.

V. Institute for Statistics indicators based on household surveys

18. The Institute is leading two groups that measure indicators based on household surveys: the Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators and a task force for education spending estimates based on household survey data.

19. A focus on equity is a key feature of the Sustainable Development Goals, which are driven by the objective to leave no one behind. Two goals refer to inequality (Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 10 on reducing inequality), while most goals include a commitment to reducing disparities. Tracking disparities at the national, regional and global levels has major implications for monitoring. Referring to the Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, the Secretary-General, in his synthesis report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, noted that broader and systematic disaggregation to reveal inequities would be fundamental (see A/69/700, para. 141).

20. In order to address challenges in measuring equity, the Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators was established as part of inter-agency coordination. Led by the Institute, UNICEF and the World Bank, the Group also includes other organizations involved in the production and use of household survey data (the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report, the Global Partnership for Education, ICF International, OECD, RTI International and the United States Agency for International Development) in order to promote the use of household survey data for education monitoring purposes at the global, regional and national levels, ensuring standardized analysis and reporting in order to complement evidence available through administrative data. The benefit will be increased

efficiency and consistency in the processing of survey data by different agencies, and strong legitimacy for equity-related survey-based indicators to serve the post-2015 education agenda, with particular emphasis on the increasing use of such data by countries. In order to address those multiple challenges, it will be necessary to agree on which areas to prioritize, harmonize approaches to analysis and reporting and identify an efficient sharing of tasks, ranging from country consultation to building up a data depository.

21. The initial focus of the Group is on three indicators proposed to monitor target 4.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 4: the completion rate; the out-of-school rate; and the percentage of children over-age for grade. The group will address other objectives in the course of the next three to five years, including harmonizing the processing of survey data, defining indicators, harmonizing the definition of individual characteristics and documenting, evaluating and pooling survey data sources.

22. The Group met in May 2016 in order to agree on key education indicators for harmonization and common reporting, exchange and review methodologies employed by respective agencies, agree on harmonizing methodologies for producing estimates for key indicators, discuss potential data sources and methods of sharing and identify members for an expert group that would provide recommendations to the Group. Since the meeting, efforts have been under way to implement agreed harmonized methodologies to process demographic and health survey and multiple indicator cluster survey data since 1990 and other national household survey data.

VI. Making a difference in measuring learning outcomes: the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning

23. The Institute established the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning to help identify solutions to the technical challenges inherent in generating a universal learning indicator and globally comparable measurements. Its key objective is to support member States in building high-quality and sustainable learning assessment systems and ensuring reporting for indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 4.

24. The Global Alliance to Monitor Learning will produce the standards and guidelines for learning assessment and methodological development to ensure national and global data reporting, including the following:

(a) National learning assessments: a manual of good practices, a catalogue of learning assessments and a data quality assessment framework for learning assessment;

(b) Global reporting: global framework for reference, standards for reporting, data validation protocols and a global achievement scale.

25. The Global Alliance to Monitor Learning operates as a platform for dialogue among diverse stakeholders to reach technical solutions to measure Sustainable Development Goal 4, including the creation of a framework to allow for comparable indicators of learning across nations. It relies on a range of partners, including

researchers, country representatives, multilateral and bilateral organizations, funders and civil society organizations.

26. Fostering that exchange or dialogue is essential to resolving the broad questions raised by the measurement of learning and to jointly identify and agree upon new solutions. Countries use a range of measures to produce information on learning and education quality. Each measure has its pros and cons, but they share many common points and complementary functions. Against that backdrop of diversity in perspectives and approaches, the international community has been called upon to produce a succinct and globally comparable indicator of learning. The Institute has already worked on a new methodology based on anchoring regional and international assessments so that they will be reported on the same scale for Sustainable Development Goal 4, indicator 4.1.1, points (b) and (c). In the next phase, which has already started, national assessment will be anchored as well. This methodology is equally important for resolving questions regarding the measurement of learning outcomes for other Goal targets, including 4.2, 4.4, 4.6 and 4.7.

27. The work is led by the Institute with the support of technical partners to produce the technical documents and guidelines. Task forces are being created in order to provide the Institute with recommendations on how best to measure each target, taking into account a wide range of organizational and technical viewpoints. The Institute will work with individual task force leads to identify the technical work needed to advance new measures and manage technical partners in successfully completing the tasks.

A. Global reporting scale

28. Development of and agreement on global reporting scales, in particular, are needed. As part of a pragmatic approach to resolve those issues, the Institute has developed a database to produce "proxy" indicators (which are not internationally comparable) to be used for reporting purposes in the interim. That will enable the Institute to produce an initial database to assess the share of pupils across nations achieving low proficiency levels in December 2016. The database can be used as an alternative for reporting on target 4.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 until other approaches, such as the universal learning scale, are developed.

B. Key tools produced by/for the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning

29. **Catalogue of Learning Assessment 2.0: technical document and questionnaire**. The new Catalogue (version 2.0) consists of three modules:

(a) Module 1: a streamlined mapping instrument to collect basic descriptive information about assessment and examination activities in countries, including household-based surveys and coverage on early childhood development and upper secondary education, in addition to primary and lower secondary education;

(b) Module 2: instrument(s) to collect national data needed to report learning outcomes for Sustainable Development Goal 4 indicators;

(c) Module 3: instrument(s) to collect the information needed to evaluate the robustness of assessment and examination systems and identify the capacity-building needs of countries.

30. **Mapping of the Global Content Framework for Reference**. A content reference list is under development for reading and mathematics for indicator 4.1.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 4, and a coding scheme is under development to map reading and mathematics national assessment frameworks onto the respective content reference list in order to develop a comprehensive global content framework for reference in each subject area.

31. **Manual of Good Practices in Learning Assessments**. A manual of good practices in learning assessments is under development. Good practices are being assembled to produce a comprehensive reference for countries that are intending to develop or update their national assessments.

32. **Data Quality Assurance Framework draft guidelines for discussion**. A concept note on the Data Quality Assurance Framework for learning assessment has been developed. Elaboration is also under way for the two main evaluation processes of the Framework:

(a) The evaluation of alignment process, on the alignment of national assessment content onto the common framework;

(b) The assessment of data processes, on the assessment of the quality of the national assessment data.

33. **Universal learning scale**. A reference scale to which all national and cross-national assessments can be mapped and aligned for global reporting has been developed and is ready to be piloted in the first quarter of 2017. The validation of the "proficiency level" on the universal achievement scale is necessary as a benchmark for reporting on the minimum proficiency in each subject area.

34. **Validation and benchmarking for the universal learning scale**. A draft concept note for discussion has been developed.

35. **Database of results from regional and international learning assessments**. A database is being developed to produce comparable data across nations on learning achievements and minimum proficiencies in mathematics and reading. To map countries to a common scale, an improved anchoring methodology has been produced which enables the linkage of the three points of measurement of indicator 4.1.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

VII. Action required by the Statistical Commission

36. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the present report.

United Nations E/CN.3/2017/23

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 December 2016

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Forty-eighth session
7-10 March 2017
Item 4 (e) of the provisional agenda*
Items for information: price statistics

Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics. The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2017/1.

16-22063 (E) 221216

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Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics: overview of developments in the area of price statistics

I. Introduction

1. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics has been mandated by the United Nations Statistical Commission to develop international standards and recommendations on price statistics, document best practice guidelines and support their implementation. The Working Group consists of representatives of Eurostat, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the World Bank. The Chair is currently held by OECD. At the forty-eighth session of the Commission, the Chair will be handed over to the World Bank.

2. The present report provides an overview of the main developments in the area of price statistics since the previous report of the Working Group to the Commission, at its 2013 session. Prior to that time, the Board had reported to the Commission on a biennial basis in uneven years. A background document providing an overview of the activities carried out since 2013 in the area of price statistics was provided to the Commission at its forty-seventh session.

3. The present report is structured as follows: the main developments in international standards and methodological guidance are addressed in section II; issues related to the international collection of price data are discussed in section III; relevant meetings and conferences are briefly reviewed in section IV; and issues for further consideration by the Commission are presented in section V.

II. International standards and methodological guidance

A. Updating the *Consumer Price Index Manual: Theory and Practice*

4. Since the publication of the *Consumer Price Index Manual: Theory and Practice* in 2004, methods and best practices have continued to evolve. During the 2014 session of the Group of Experts on Consumer Price Indices, countries expressed a need for the *Manual* to better reflect current best practices and to include more practical compilation advice wherever possible. The Working Group endorsed and expressed support for an update of the *Manual*, with IMF as lead agency.

5. Overall, the goal of the update is to produce a *Manual* that includes more practical compilation advice to guide compilers. It should be stressed, however, that this will be only an update of the *Manual*, not a complete revision. Work on updating the *Manual* will be undertaken and guided by a technical expert group, whose members will represent not only international price index experts, but also compilers from national statistical offices.

6. Work on updating the *Manual* has gained momentum. The updated *Manual* will comprise two volumes: volume I will focus on the compilation of consumer price indices (CPIs), while volume II will review the theoretical and conceptual foundations of CPIs. Members of the technical expert group are currently reviewing each of the chapters in the *Manual* and preparing outlines of proposed changes and updates. These proposed changes and updates will be discussed and most probably agreed upon during a meeting of the technical expert group to be held from 18 to 20 January 2017. Subsequently, work will commence on updating and revising each chapter. As revised chapters become available during 2017, the draft chapters will be posted on a website for review and comment by CPI compilers. IMF will report on progress to the Working Group on a regular basis.

B. *Methodological Guide for Developing Producer Price Indices for Services*

7. Over the past decade, the field of producer price indices for services has further developed. Considerable methodological and practical progress has been made by both European Union and non-European Union OECD countries, resulting in a significant increase in the availability of producer price indices for services. To reflect these developments, the *Eurostat-OECD Methodological Guide for Developing Producer Price Indices for Services* has been updated. The second edition of the *Guide* was published in December 2014 and is available from the OECD website.[1]

8. The *Guide* complements the *International Producer Price Index Manual: Theory and Practice*, published by IMF in 2004, and does so in two ways: it focuses on service-specific aspects in the producer price index (PPI) compilation by further developing the conceptual framework; and it adds detailed descriptions of PPI measurements for a wide range of individual service industries. It is aimed at helping countries develop producer price indices for services by sharing experiences and lessons learned in the collection of data and the compilation of indices. The update of the *Guide* has been jointly produced by Eurostat, OECD and members of a task force with delegates from 14 countries, in full cooperation with the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics.[2] It updates and replaces the first edition of the *Guide*, which was published in 2005. The second edition of the *Guide* had three objectives: (a) to propose a global and comprehensive framework that improves the understanding of problems related to the specific nature of services, i.e. that many services are unique and are not repeated, at least not in a fully comparable manner, or that they might be customer-specific; (b) to identify practical solutions implemented by countries for developing producer price indices for specific service industries (e.g., transport and storage, information and communications services, and professional, scientific and technical services); and (c) to promote new methodologies that, in some cases, are still under development (e.g., financial intermediation, insurance and human health activities) and for which the sharing of experiences and expertise will help address remaining issues and challenges.

[1] www.oecd.org/std/prices-ppp/eurostat-oecd-methodological-guide-for-developing-producer-price-indices-for-services-9789264220676-en.htm.

[2] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/citygroup/voorburg.htm.

C. *Handbook on Residential Property Price Indices*

9. In 2013, the *Handbook on Residential Property Price Indices*[3] was published in response to recommendation 19 of the Group of 20 (G-20) Data Gaps Initiative (see sect. III.E below). It was the first comprehensive overview of conceptual and practical issues related to the compilation of price indices for residential properties. The development of the *Handbook* was coordinated by Eurostat, under the joint responsibility of the six member organizations of the Working Group.

10. The aim of the *Handbook* is to give practical guidance on compilation and to improve the international comparability of residential property price indices. It is meant to assist producers of residential property price indices, in particular in countries that are revising or setting up such indices. The *Handbook* draws on a wide range of experience and expertise in an attempt to describe practical and suitable measurement methods. It provides an overview of conceptual issues, and then describes and discusses in detail the various methods for compiling constant-quality indices. Particular importance is attached to highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. Throughout, empirical examples are given. The final chapter gives recommendations for best practice.

11. Since its publication, the *Handbook* has become the reference for the compilation of residential property price indices. As such, it is a major driver of the harmonization and international comparability of such statistics.

D. Document on the measurement of commercial property price indices

12. Following the example of the *Handbook on Residential Property Price Indices* and against the backdrop of the G-20 Data Gaps Initiative, work on conceptual and practical guidance for the compilation of commercial property price indices started in 2013. Commercial property price indices are a new and very challenging domain of official statistics, and raise a number of particularly difficult issues. Under the aegis of the member organizations of the Working Group, Eurostat took the lead in coordinating the drafting of a document by a team of experts. In addition to IMF and OECD, the European Central Bank was deeply involved in the work.

13. The resulting document is entitled "Commercial property price indicators: sources, methods and issues", and is meant to provide the foundation for a future handbook on commercial property price indices. It sets out a conceptual framework for the compilation of such indices, and presents the main methods, possible data sources and specific challenges. Finally, an overview is given of property price indices and related indicators that are currently available in a number of countries. Following endorsement by the Working Group, it is planned that the document will be published as a Eurostat working paper in early 2017.

[3] See http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/hicp/methodology/housing-price-statistics/residential-property-handbook.

E. Update of the classification of individual consumption according to purpose

14. The work of the technical subgroup for the classification of individual consumption according to purpose, established under the umbrella of the Expert Group on International Statistical Classifications, is following the time frame defined in its mandate. A first meeting of the subgroup was held in March 2016 in Geneva, with the aim of evaluating the feasibility and relevance of proposals for change and proposing concrete changes in the current structure. The meeting was followed up by written exchanges among participants of the subgroup and further consultations with the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, thus arriving at a first draft of the revised classification, including a fifth level of digits, in the beginning of September 2016. A worldwide consultation on the draft to obtain feedback on the various proposals was conducted in September and October 2016. The Expert Group plans to finalize the revised classification of individual consumption according to purpose during 2017 and submit it for adoption by the Commission at its forty-ninth session in 2018. As one of the main users of the classification, the Working Group is well represented in the technical subgroup, either directly or through representatives of the various international organizations involved.

III. International data collection

A. Changes in the collection of data on consumer price indices

15. Under a joint project of IMF and OECD, detailed CPI data and associated weights for each of the 12 classifications of individual consumption according to purpose for both national CPI and harmonized indices for consumer prices series are being collected and are now available on the websites of IMF[4] and OECD.[5] In total, data are currently available for more than 100 countries, and efforts are ongoing to expand coverage and improve response rates. Improvements will also continue to be made to other aspects of the dissemination of these data. This combined IMF-OECD initiative will contribute to efforts by international organizations to coordinate data collection from countries with the aim of easing the response burden on national statistical offices and central banks.

B. Collection of data on house prices

16. The Bank for International Settlements and OECD have a great deal of experience in collecting and disseminating data on developments in house prices, whether sourced from official statistics or from private producers. The development of the *Handbook on Residential Property Price Indices* (see sect. II.D above) has given new momentum to the development of statistics on house prices, as part of the work package of official statistics. The G-20 Data Gaps Initiative also played an

[4] See http://data.imf.org/CPI.

[5] See http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=PRICES_COICOP and http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=HICP_COICOP.

instrumental role by inviting the Bank for International Settlements and member central banks to consider disseminating on the Bank's website publicly available data on real estate prices. Official numbers are now being published by Eurostat[6] (on the basis of a regulation that is binding for all European Union member States) and, combined with their previous dissemination practices, the Bank for International Settlements[7] and OECD.[8] To further align the collection and dissemination practices of international organizations with regard to house prices, a working group on house prices was formed in 2015 under the umbrella of the G-20 Inter-Agency Group on Economic and Financial Statistics (see sect. III.E below). The Working Group, whose membership consists of representatives of the Bank for International Settlements, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, IMF, OECD and the World Bank, closely coordinates its activities with those of the Working Group.

17. The second phase of the G-20 Data Gaps Initiative requested G-20 economies to publish residential property price indices consistent with the *Handbook* and supply those data to the relevant international organizations. As a result of fruitful discussions, the international organizations agreed on a common set of selected and headline indicators for most countries. The Working Group now focuses on the development of a standard template and terminology (including precise definitions) for the collection of national data on house prices and related housing indicators. This template will be put forward to the relevant countries for further consideration and agreement. The international organizations will also cooperate on further harmonizing their long time series and on collecting and disseminating regional data (with a special focus on urban areas), keeping in mind parallel efforts being made in the area of commercial property price indicators.

C. International Comparison Programme

18. At its forty-seventh session, held in March 2016, the Commission discussed the future of the International Comparison Program, in the light of the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair group on the evaluation of the 2011 round of the International Comparison Program. The Commission instituted the Program as a permanent element of the global statistical work programme. Starting from 2017, the Program will be conducted on a regular basis at more frequent intervals. The goal is to work towards implementing the International Comparison Program on the basis of a "rolling survey approach", consisting of a system of spreading out surveys over a cycle, in order to decrease the burden on national statistical offices and to allow for more flexibility in conducting the surveys according to the specific conditions of participating countries. The Commission noted the necessity of seeking synergies in the production of price statistics by integrating International Comparison Program and CPI survey activities, in order to improve the consistency of price statistics and to further decrease the demands of the Program on national statistical offices.

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[6] See http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/product?code=prc_hpi_q&mode=view.

[7] See www.bis.org/statistics/pp.htm.

[8] See http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=RPPI_TARGET for headline indicators; http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=RPPI for the complete database on house prices; and http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=HOUSE_PRICES for analytical house price indicators.

19. The Commission further established the governance structure of the Program, under which it will continue to be conducted by global, regional and national implementing agencies, under the overall oversight of a governing board and with the guidance of technical advisory task force or task forces. To ensure efficient coordination between global and regional agencies, the Commission established an inter-agency coordination group. The International Comparison Program Inter-Agency Coordination Group is now coordinating the preparations to launch the 2017 cycle of surveys and to support countries in implementing the activities of the Program. The results of the 2017 comparison are planned for release by the end of 2019.

D. Implementation of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange format

20. The process of compiling data structure definitions, in order to facilitate data exchange using the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) format, has recently also started in the area of price statistics. Content-related experts from the Bank for International Settlements, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, ILO, IMF and OECD liaised with technical experts experienced in the format to form a technical group under the umbrella of the Ownership Group for SDMX implementation in Macroeconomic Statistics. The first meeting of the technical group was held in July 2016. It was decided to develop data structure definitions for prices progressively, starting with consumer price indices, and subsequently taking forward producer price indices, export-import price indices, residential property price indices and commercial property price indicators. Purchasing power parities have been excluded, at least for the time being. With this addition, the Ownership Group now covers the following areas of statistics: national accounts (including government finance statistics); balance of payments; foreign direct investment; and prices.

E. G-20 Data Gaps Initiative

21. The G-20 Data Gaps Initiative consists of 20 recommendations to improve statistics in response to the economic and financial crisis. The initiative, governed by the Inter-Agency Group on Economic and Financial Statistics, has moved into its second phase. Among the 20 recommendations, two are directly related to price statistics. Recommendation II.17, on residential property prices, has the following goal:

> The G-20 economies to publish residential property price indices consistent with the *Handbook on Residential Property Price Indices* and supply these data to the relevant international organizations, including the Bank for International Settlements, Eurostat and OECD. The Inter-Agency Group, in collaboration with the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics, to work on a set of common headline residential property price indices; encouraging the production of long time series; developing a list of other housing-related indicators; and disseminating the headline residential property price data via the Principal Global Indicators website.

Recommendation II.18, on commercial property prices, has the following broad objective: "The Inter-Agency Group, in collaboration with the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics, to enhance the methodological guidance on the compilation of commercial property price indices and encourage dissemination of data on commercial property prices via the Bank for International Settlements website". The Inter-Agency Group closely cooperates with the Working Group in moving forward on these recommendations.

22. In the context of this initiative, OECD calculates and publishes a G-20 aggregate for CPI on a monthly basis, in addition to a G-20 aggregate for economic growth on a quarterly basis. The relevant CPI data are being published in a monthly press release.[9]

IV. Meetings and conferences

A. Group of Experts on Consumer Price Indices

23. The meetings of the Group of Experts on Consumer Price Indices are organized every second year by ECE in cooperation with ILO. The Group of Experts supports the development of internationally agreed standards and methods in the field of CPIs and provides recommendations on good practices with the overall objective of improving the quality and international comparability of CPI statistics. The meetings are organized under the aegis of the Conference of European Statisticians and are attended by price statisticians from Conference member countries, as well as compilers from other regions. Experts from international organizations and researchers on index numbers also attend.

24. The 2016 meeting of the Group of Experts was held from 2 to 4 May in Geneva. It discussed the following topics: scanner data and big data; synergies between CPIs and purchasing power parities and integration of survey activities; methods for calculation of elementary and higher-level price indices; difficult-to-measure products and services; CPIs for different population groups, income groups and geographic areas; and house price indices. In addition to this, IMF provided information on the work on updating the 2004 *International Producer Price Index Manual: Theory and Practice*. The proceedings of the meetings of the Group of Experts are available from the website of ECE.[10] The next meeting of the Group is scheduled to be held in May 2018.

B. Ottawa Group on Price Indices

25. The Ottawa Group on Price Indices focuses on applied research, particularly though not exclusively in the area of consumer price indices. The Group examines the advantages and disadvantages of various concepts, methods and procedures in the context of realistic operational environments. Participants are specialists and practitioners who work for national statistical offices or international organizations. The Ottawa Group meets every second year, alternating with the Group of Experts

[9] See www.oecd.org/std/prices-ppp.

[10] www.unece.org/statistics/meetings-and-events.html#/.

on Consumer Price Indices. As a city group of the Commission, it reports separately to the Commission every second year, in even years.[11]

26. The next meeting of the Ottawa Group is scheduled to take place from 10 to 12 May 2017 in Germany and will be hosted by the Deutsche Bundesbank. The meeting will discuss the following topics: new data sources for CPI compilation; compilation of property price indices; methods of calculating index numbers; meeting user needs; and the treatment of quality changes and seasonal products. More information on the proceedings of the Ottawa Group is available on the Group's website.[12]

V. Issues for further consideration

27. The Commission is invited to take note of the present report.

[11] The reports are available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/citygroup/ottawa.htm.

[12] www.ottawagroup.org.

United Nations E/CN.3/2017/24

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 December 2016

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Forty-eighth session
7-10 March 2017
Item 4 (f) of the provisional agenda*
Items for information: short-term economic statistics

Short-term economic statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report on short-term economic statistics. The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2017/1.

16-22066 (E) 221216

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I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission, at its forty-second session, endorsed an international programme of work on short-term economic statistics as part of a coordinated statistical response to the economic and financial crisis. The international programme was developed by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat) in collaboration with Statistics Canada, Statistics Italy, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Netherlands and the Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service. It comprised four themes, namely, business cycle composite indicators, economic tendency surveys, rapid estimates, and data template and analytical indicators. The Commission, inter alia, approved the preparation of handbooks on those themes with a view to providing guidance, best practices and harmonized principles to assist Member States in compiling and reporting internationally comparable short-term economic statistics.

2. The present report provides an overview of the progress made in the preparation of the aforementioned handbooks and presents the ongoing and future activities in support of the implementation of a short-term economic statistics programme.

II. Preparation of the handbooks

3. The four handbooks prepared under the programme concern cyclical composite indicators, economic tendency surveys, rapid estimates, and the data template and analytical indicators for short-term statistics. A description of each handbook and the progress made in its preparation is presented below.

A. Handbook on cyclical composite indicators

4. Cyclical composite indicators are important because they address the ongoing concerns of the assessment of short-term changes in economic activity. In addition, they serve as an integral part of the early warning system because they provide information about the occurrence and timing of upturns and downturns in the economy.

5. The working group tasked with the preparation of the handbook on cyclical composite indicators comprised CBS Netherlands, Eurostat, the Conference Board and the Statistics Division and was led by CBS Netherlands.

6. An initial draft of the handbook on cyclical composite indicators was circulated for expert review in the period from December 2015 to January 2016. After the comments from the expert review were addressed, a final draft of the handbook was submitted for global consultation in the period from February to April 2016. At the time of reporting, the handbook was expected to be finalized in January 2017, after the comments from the global consultation were to be incorporated.

7. The handbook provides an overview of various types of cyclical composite indicators and of the most commonly used compilation techniques. It also provides

a methodological overview of the approaches to compilation together with their advantages and drawbacks. Various topics are presented didactically in the handbook, thereby making it easier for both expert and non-expert users to read. Moreover, complex formalizations are included and presented in a way that aids beginners and non-expert users in understanding the techniques described.

B. Handbook on economic tendency surveys

8. Economic tendency surveys provide qualitative information, which cannot be collected using quantitative statistical methods. The above-mentioned surveys have proved to be a cost-effective means of generating timely information on short-term economic developments, which can be seen as a valuable complement to the system of quantitative statistics. They also serve as an integral part of an early warning system, since they provide information on the occurrence and timing of upturns and downturns in the economy. The handbook on tendency surveys is aimed at providing best practices and harmonized principles on tendency survey sample selection, questionnaire design, survey questions, survey execution, data processing, the dissemination of results and the use of composite tendency indicators.

9. The working group tasked with the preparation of the handbook on economic tendency surveys comprised the Statistics Office of Italy (ISTAT), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the KOF Swiss Economic Institute, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zürich), the National Statistical Coordination Board of the Philippines, CBS Netherlands and the Statistics Division and was led by ISTAT.

10. The handbook on economic tendency surveys was circulated for global consultation in the period from July to August 2014 and was finalized in December 2015, after the incorporation of the comments from the global consultation.

11. The handbook provides internationally harmonized principles to be used in the conduct of tendency surveys, covering questionnaire design, survey frame and sample design, estimation procedures, data collection, dissemination and use of tendency surveys. It builds on the existing work undertaken by countries and international and regional organizations, most notably the work carried out as part of the Joint Harmonized European Union Programme of Business and Consumer Surveys and the related guidelines issued by the European Commission Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs,[1] and the work undertaken by OECD. The handbook covers both types of economic tendency surveys — business tendency surveys and consumer tendency surveys — and introduces flexibility for countries to adapt economic tendency surveys to their specific contexts.

C. Handbook on rapid estimates

12. Rapid estimates, which are indicators that are available with a relatively short time lag, are important because they provide the first official assessment of short-term changes in economic activity. Rapid estimates (nowcasts, flash estimates,

[1] Available from http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/db_indicators/surveys/method_guides/index_en.htm.

advanced estimates and preliminary estimates) are regularly compiled in several countries and have become a referential statistical product for many statistical institutions. The increasing attention devoted to rapid estimates by the media and policymakers underlines the role that such estimates play in providing an early estimate of key short-term macroeconomic indicators.

13. The compilation of a glossary on rapid estimates has been completed and is available on the "Statistics Explained" website of Eurostat. The glossary clarifies the different typologies of rapid estimates, their purposes and their characteristics, and provides a harmonized terminology to establish a common understanding of rapid estimates. While the glossary is a self-standing product, it constitutes an important part of the handbook on rapid estimates.

14. The drafting of the handbook on rapid estimates was carried out by a working group composed of Eurostat, the Statistics Division and CBS Netherlands and led by Eurostat.

15. A first draft of the handbook was circulated for expert review in the period from March to May 2016. A revised draft of the handbook, incorporating the comments from the expert review, was circulated for global consultation in the period from December 2016 to January 2017. The handbook is expected to be finalized in the first half of 2017.

16. The handbook provides international statistical guidance based on best practices and harmonized principles used in the compilation and reporting of rapid estimates. In particular, it provides an overview of the different types of rapid estimates based on the glossary of rapid estimates, and the statistical and econometric methods for the construction of rapid estimates and guidance in quality assessment. The handbook is aimed in particular at compilers of rapid estimates, although users of rapid estimates will also benefit from it, in particular in understanding the methods used to compile rapid estimates.

D. Handbook on data template and analytical indicators for short-term statistics

17. The handbook on data template and analytical indicators is based on an internationally accepted data and metadata template for short-term economic statistics. The indicators are suitable for macroeconomic surveillance, early warning of economic and financial vulnerabilities and detection of turning points in business cycles. The handbook is complemented by a knowledge base on economic statistics.[2]

18. The data template is the result of global consultation across the international statistical community and was endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its forty-second session. The template consists of 12 categories of statistics for the monitoring of macroeconomic and institutional sectoral developments through quarterly national accounts supplemented by short-term statistics for production, prices, markets (labour, real estate and financial) and sectors (government, financial, non-financial, household and external). These 12 categories follow logically from

[2] Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/EconStatKB/Knowledgebase.aspx.

the consolidation and rearrangement of the standards developed by Eurostat through its principal European economic indicators and by the International Monetary Fund through its Special Data Dissemination Standard Plus, Special Data Dissemination Standard and General Data Dissemination System. The template is also reflected in the Principal Global Indicators developed by the Inter-Agency Group on Economic and Financial Statistics.

19. The handbook, prepared by the Statistics Division, elaborates on the methodological descriptions and the use of individual short-term economic statistics in the data template. It explains the statistical and analytical properties of short-term economic statistics, why they are relevant to explaining economic activity and how they relate to an integrated set of short-term economic statistics of quarterly national accounts and component data. It also explains the concept and the benefits of a centralized data hub for short-term statistics at the national level to facilitate the dissemination, and thus the use, of short-term statistics. Examples of data hubs that have been established in a number of countries are also presented. The handbook is designed to serve both the compiler and the user of these statistics. It contains useful links to reference materials that offer more in-depth expositions.

20. The handbook on data template and analytical indicators was circulated for global consultation in the period from November to December 2015 and was finalized in August 2016, after the incorporation of comments from the global consultation.

21. The updating of the knowledge base on economic statistics is an ongoing activity that entails the inclusion of new and updated methodologies and country practices.

III. Activities and the way forward

22. During the preparation of the handbooks on the four themes of the international programme on short-term economic statistics, activities focused on the strengthening of capacity-building at the regional and national levels and engaging in liaison with the academic community to seek synergies with research in the areas of economic tendency surveys, cyclical composite indicators and rapid estimates.

23. The Statistics Division has supported the initiatives of the regional commissions to implement their programmes in order to enhance the capacity of Member States to compile short-term economic statistics. In particular, the Division is collaborating with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to implement its regional programme on economic statistics in the Asia-Pacific region. The aim of the programme is to enhance the capacity of Member States to produce and disseminate a core set of economic statistics, including short-term economic statistics, in line with current international statistical standards. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia is implementing the United Nations Development Account project entitled "Strengthening the statistical capacity of the countries members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in producing and disseminating short-term economic indicators for sustainable growth" to enhance the capacity of seven pilot Member States in the region to compile priority short-term economic indicators that they have identified.

The Economic Commission for Europe is developing a handbook on leading, composite and sentiment (LCS) indicators that is designed to provide recommendations of good practices for use by statistical offices in producing such indicators. The recommendations would clarify the possible roles of statistical offices in producing LCS indicators and provide guidance on such production. The Statistics Division is using the lessons learned and experience gained from these regional initiatives to undertake similar initiatives in other regions in collaboration with regional and international organizations.

24. The Statistical Division has also engaged in a dialogue with the academic community through the organization of one-day workshops prior to the conference of the Centre for International Research on Economic Tendency Surveys (CIRET) in 2014 and 2016. These events brought together experts from the official statistics community, universities and international and regional organizations with the objective of facilitating the sharing of knowledge.

25. Given the increasing importance of short-term economic statistics to macroeconomic surveillance, early warning of economic and financial vulnerabilities and detection of turning points in business cycles, and the fact that many Member States still lack the capacity to compile such statistics, the Statistics Division will continue to collaborate with regional and international organizations and academic institutions to assist countries in implementing and strengthening their short-term statistics programmes and encourage the establishment of national data hubs for the sharing of the information.

26. Work is ongoing in the development and implementation of statistical data and metadata exchange standards for selected indicators of the data template as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is expected that progress on this work will benefit the compilation of short-term economic statistics and data-sharing. Countries are encouraged to establish national central data hubs using statistical data and metadata exchange standards on a voluntary basis, in accordance with the proposed internationally accepted data template, to ensure harmonization with international guidelines.

IV. Conclusion

27. The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

United Nations E/CN.3/2017/25

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 December 2016

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Forty-eighth session
7-10 March 2017
Item 4 (g) of the provisional agenda*
Items for information: finance statistics

Report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics, which is submitted to the Statistical Commission for information.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2017/1.

16-22069 (E) 221216

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Report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics

I. Introduction

1. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics,[1] established in 1992 under the auspices of the Statistical Commission, reconvened in 1998 to coordinate work on improving the data on external debt and international reserves, with attention to the methodological soundness, transparency, timeliness and availability of data. The Task Force has worked on setting methodological standards and promoting data availability for statistics on external and public sector debt. A report on the programme of work of the Task Force was provided to the Commission for its session held in March 2015. The present report provides an update on work conducted since the issuance of the previous report and outlines the programme of work agreed upon at the meeting of the Task Force, hosted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, D.C., on 17 and 18 March 2016. The programme of work of the Task Force will continue to benefit from the cooperative, coordinated and sustained efforts of its members, which are essential to its success.

II. Availability of debt data

A. World Bank Quarterly External Debt Statistics Database

Medium-term external debt statistics strategy

2. The External Debt Statistics Working Group, which was established in mid-2015, held videoconferences in December 2015 and in June and September 2016. At the videoconference held in December 2015, the Working Group discussed the World Bank quarterly external debt statistics (QEDS) metadata questionnaire and the presentation of external debt statistics tables according to the valuation basis of debt securities. At the videoconferences held in June and September 2016, it focused on the implementation of the medium-term external debt statistics strategy.

3. During the 2016 meeting of the Task Force, IMF, in consultation with the World Bank, proposed discussing a medium-term strategy to further improve country participation, data availability and the consistency of external debt statistics. The proposed medium-term external debt statistics strategy includes four main objectives: (a) increase the number of reporting economies, mainly for countries that participate in the Enhanced General Data Dissemination System; (b) increase data granularity, mainly for Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) subscribers and SDDS Plus adherents; (c) broaden the range of data sources, while ensuring that data ownership remains with countries; and (d) raise awareness of QEDS among end users and data compilers. It was decided that the

[1] The members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics are the Bank for International Settlements, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the secretariat of the Paris Club, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Bank. The Task Force is chaired by the IMF Statistics Department and meets annually.

main vehicle for the implementation of the medium-term strategy would be the Working Group.

4. With a view to increasing the participation of Enhanced General Data Dissemination System economies in the QEDS Database, IMF, at videoconferences of the Working Group, informed participants of a new capacity development project targeting 17 francophone economies in West and Central Africa, most of which are not currently reporting to the Database. The workplan for the project includes key objectives, including the promotion of participation in the Database as part of the international investment position initiative. With a view to supporting the workplan, the World Bank is gathering information from its Debtor Reporting System and QEDS Database on those 17 countries. UNCTAD and the Commonwealth Secretariat will also provide information from their debt recording systems on those countries. The World Bank, through its Debtor Reporting System, and the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNCTAD, through their debt recording systems, will continue to assist countries in improving QEDS reporting.

5. With regard to increasing the data granularity of the Database, the Working Group is sharing the views of users as to which QEDS tables are the most important and which elements need to be prioritized. In the coming months, IMF will try to identify how QEDS data is used by IMF economists, including the most used tables. The European Central Bank will also start reporting net external debt position data for the euro area.

Data availability

6. In October 2014, the World Bank, in collaboration with IMF, launched the new QEDS Database in line with the 2013 External Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users (2013 EDS Guide) and the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, Sixth Edition (BPM6).[2] The QEDS Database comprises two databases: one for the external debt data of countries that subscribe to SDDS (QEDS/SDDS Database) and one for countries that participate in the General Data Dissemination System (QEDS/GDDS Database). As at October 2016, 123 economies reported quarterly external debt position data, with 76 economies reporting to the QEDS/SDDS Database and 47 to the QEDS/GDDS Database. The number of SDDS subscribers has increased. Currently, all 63 SDDS subscribers, as well as the 11 SDDS Plus adherents, the euro area and New Zealand, report data for table 1 of the QEDS/SDDS Database on gross external debt position, as prescribed by SDDS. No new economies are participating in the QEDS/GDDS Database. Currently, 47 of the 110 GDDS participants (43 per cent) report to the QEDS/GDDS Database. Notably, 33 of them also report data for table 6 of the QEDS/GDDS Database on gross external debt position, as prescribed by SDDS. Therefore, over 100 economies currently report quarterly external debt to the QEDS Database, as prescribed by SDDS.

[2] See http://datatopics.worldbank.org/debt/home.

7. With regard to progress in the adoption of the 2013 EDS Guide and BPM6, 67 economies reported to the QEDS/SDDS Database and 32 economies reported to the QEDS/GDDS Database in line with those guides.[3]

8. The number of economies reporting data for the encouraged and supplementary tables of the QEDS Database, which contain additional information, is increasing, but there is ample room for further progress. As at October 2016, 37 economies reported data for table 2 of the QEDS/SDDS Database on gross external debt position: foreign currency and domestic denominated debt,[4] 15 reported data for table 2.1 on gross external foreign currency debt and foreign currency-linked debt position and 12 economies reported data for table 3.1 on gross external debt position: short-term remaining maturity. The reporting of this additional analytical information on the gross external debt position is particularly useful in the context of the growing interest in more granular data on debt position.[5]

Quarterly external debt statistics metadata questionnaire

9. The World Bank prepared the QEDS metadata questionnaire, which was shared for comments and discussed at the meeting of the External Debt Statistics Working Group held in December 2015. Separate metadata questionnaires were developed for the QEDS/SDDS and QEDS/GDDS databases and sent to reporters in February 2016. At the meeting of the Working Group in June 2016, the World Bank presented the results and the proposed metadata update, which included increasing the visibility of the revision policy in the Database for dissemination.

10. As agreed upon at the Task Force meeting, countries are currently being presented in the World Bank QEDS debt data portal according to their valuation of debt securities. Subtables to table 1 were created in the cross-country tables of the QEDS/SDDS Database (http://datatopics.worldbank.org/debt/qeds), presenting the gross external debt position for those countries that value debt securities at market value, nominal value and a mixture of market/nominal value or using other valuation methods.

B. Quarterly Public Sector Debt Statistics Database

11. The Quarterly Public Sector Debt Statistics (QPSD) Database, which is a collaborative effort by the World Bank, Eurostat, OECD, the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNCTAD and IMF, comprises data on the gross public sector debt

[3] To maintain a single comprehensive database covering consistent historical data, the World Bank converts data reported in line with the 2003 EDS Guide and the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, Fifth Edition (BPM5) to bring it in line with the 2013 EDS Guide and BPM6 using generic conversion rules.

[4] The QEDS/GDDS Database also includes a table on foreign and domestic currency breakdown of public and publicly guaranteed private sector external debt. Currently, the foreign/domestic currency split is reported by 30 economies (64 per cent of GDDS reporters).

[5] In that regard, to support the analysis of currency mismatches and liquidity risks, the second phase of the Group of 20 Data Gaps Initiative includes a recommendation on international investment position (recommendation II.10), which underscores the reporting of additional analytical international investment position information on the currency composition of external assets and liabilities and remaining maturity data.

position at nominal value. Data on central government must be provided, while data on all other areas of government, such as general government, are provided on a voluntary basis. The minimal requirement is the reporting of data on the debt position of central government by type of instrument.

12. As at November 2016, 82 economies have provided data for the QPSD Database, of which 70 economies reported data between the first quarter of 2015 and the second quarter of 2016 on central government, 62 economies on general government and 32 economies on the non-financial public sector.[6] Only 27 economies reported data for the public sector as a whole. The Public Sector Debt Statistics Working Group, with representatives from the Bank for International Settlements, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, IMF, OECD, UNCTAD and the World Bank, is contributing to the ongoing development of the joint Database. The group fosters consistency across international organizations and facilitates discussion and consensus-building on key issues related to public sector debt statistics. One of the major undertakings of the group relates to further improving the transparency of the gross public sector debt data disseminated through the QPSD Database by presenting debt data using the matrix approach, in which debt coverage is classified according to the aggregates referred to as D1-D4[7] and sector coverage is classified according to the aggregates referred to as GL1-GL5. A note explaining the various concepts has also been included for users. The World Bank and OECD are also working on the metadata to further improve the transparency of the Database.

13. The Working Group has met twice, in June and September 2016, since the most recent meeting of the Task Force and agreed on the work programme until March 2017, when the next Task Force meeting will be held. In the light of a recommendation made at that meeting of the Task Force, the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNCTAD, the World Bank and IMF have set up a country engagement group. As at November 2016, the group had met three times. Although the basic operations have been agreed upon for the country engagement group, no work programme has been set up owing to uncertainty about funding. As a result, only current work programmes are coordinated. In the light of the most recent meeting of the Working Group, discussions are also ongoing between OECD and Eurostat to explore options to move to the complete reporting of quarterly public sector debt through the Eurostat option. A number of improvements to the dissemination of quarterly public sector debt relating to counterpart information were also agreed upon. Further progress was achieved in providing online publications for users explaining the various definitions of debt and net debt. Those issues will be discussed further at the next meeting of the Working Group, and a draft paper on net debt will be submitted to the Task Force for approval.

14. In order to strengthen the transparency and cross-national consistency of public sector debt statistics, the Task Force continues to endorse and support the comprehensive coverage of debt instruments for general government, with a specific focus on those economies not yet reporting, as a benchmark for achieving greater fiscal transparency in public sector debt statistics. This is consistent with other

[6] It should be noted that all countries listed have reported data prior to the first quarter of 2015. For example, data are available for 25 countries since the first quarter of 2000.

[7] Including a regional debt concept (D2A).

initiatives and priorities, including the standard template for recommendation No. 16 of the second phase of the Group of 20 Data Gaps Initiative (previously recommendation No. 18 of the first phase of the Initiative) and the SDDS Plus category on general government gross debt.

C. Joint External Debt Hub[8]

15. In 2015, the World Bank presented the revised creditor/market tables prepared by the Joint External Debt Hub, developed by the Bank for International Settlements, IMF, OECD and the World Bank.[9] Improvements to the presentation of the table included: (a) replacing the data from the Bank for International Settlements on international debt securities with the data from the Coordinated Investment Portfolio Survey on debt securities and subsequently moving the data from the Bank for International Settlements to the supplementary information tables; (b) adding a new component on short-term and original maturity for data on debt securities from the Coordinated Investment Portfolio Survey; and (c) replacing the OECD official trade credits with Berne Union's short-term insured trade finance. During the 2016 Task Force meeting, the World Bank presented a proposal for revamping the Joint External Debt Hub website, with a view to making it more user-friendly. The proposed new website was shared by the World Bank for comments in June 2016 and is expected to be launched by the end of 2016.

III. Capacity-building

16. IMF continued to provide technical assistance in improving the capacity to compile and disseminate external debt statistics. IMF also continued to promote the 2013 EDS Guide through training courses. In February 2016, a two-week course on external debt statistics was conducted in Washington, D.C., with the participation of officials from 39 IMF member countries.[10] In May 2016, IMF also conducted a new course on cross-border position statistics, which includes work on external debt statistics and the links between different data sets within international accounts, in Washington, D.C., with the participation of officials from 39 economies. This new two-week course was also delivered at the IMF Regional Training Institute in Singapore in November 2015 and a one-week version of the course was conducted in Mexico at the Centre for Latin American Monetary Studies and in Slovenia at the Centre of Excellence in Finance in December 2015.

17. As part of its ongoing work, IMF also provides training assistance and delivers training courses in public sector debt. Training assistance activities are undertaken in the context of the 18-month regional project to improve government finance and public sector debt statistics in targeted South-Eastern European members (Albania,

[8] The Joint External Debt Hub website was launched in March 2006 to provide a one-stop source for comprehensive external debt statistics.

[9] The table presents data from creditor/market sources on external debt and selected foreign assets for over 200 economies. The creditor/market data are sourced by the four agencies involved and are available at www.jedh.org/jedh_creditor.html.

[10] External debt statistics courses have been conducted every other year since 2005 at IMF headquarters.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia).[11] In addition, IMF conducts training and workshops on public sector debt statistics on a regular basis. An in-country workshop was held in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in November 2015, and a similar workshop for West African Economic and Monetary Union countries was held in conjunction with the West African Institute for Financial and Economic Management in Accra in July 2016.[12]

18. The Commonwealth Secretariat and UNCTAD have provided support to countries in the production and dissemination of debt statistics, through conferences, regional workshops and country-specific activities.

19. Over the past year, the Commonwealth Secretariat organized two training workshops on the compilation and dissemination of debt statistics through the use of its Debt Recording and Management System. One of the workshops was held in conjunction with the Macroeconomic and Financial Management Institute of Eastern and Southern Africa and attended by 29 debt managers from 10 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, while the other was organized jointly with the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and attended by 37 debt managers from 15 Caribbean countries. A presentation on the Debt Recording and Management System software was made by the Commonwealth Secretariat at the IMF course on debt statistics organized jointly with the Macroeconomic and Financial Management Institute of Eastern and Southern Africa in Lesotho in October 2015.

20. The Commonwealth Secretariat assisted Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania, through a country mission, in improving the quality of debt data, including through the installation of the latest version of the Debt Recording and Management System, the provision of training and the building of a public debt database at the Zanzibar Ministry of Finance. Cyprus, Myanmar and the Crown Agents Bank of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland adopted the Debt Recording and Management System in 2016. The Commonwealth Secretariat released version 2, service pack 2, of the System in response to user requirements. Important enhancements in the new version include: (a) the addition of a liability management option covering prepayment and accelerated payment; (b) enhanced sensitivity analysis; (c) an improved dashboard facility; (d) a revised template of the QEDS/GDDS Database; (e) support for the new Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange purpose codes for the World Bank Debtor Reporting System; and (f) improved reporting functionality.

21. Between August 2015 and July 2016, UNCTAD organized a regional workshop, in collaboration with the Macroeconomic and Financial Management Institute of Eastern and Southern Africa, and 10 in-country training events, in Albania, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire (2), Gabon, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Nicaragua, the Philippines and Zambia, related to strengthening capacities in the compilation and dissemination of debt statistics. The workshops used the capacity-building courses of the Debt Management and Financial Analysis System on debt validation, debt statistics and debt portfolio analysis, which contribute to the

[11] The project started in November 2014 and is financed with funding from the Government of Switzerland and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs.

[12] More workshops are planned for the remainder of the fiscal year 2017, for example in Jordan for Iraqi officials and in Bahrain.

dissemination of the latest standards relating to the 2013 EDS Guide and the Public Sector Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users.

22. UNCTAD installed the latest version of the Debt Management and Financial Analysis System, DMFAS 6, which incorporates methodological standards promoted by the 2013 EDS Guide and the Public Sector Debt Statistics Guide, at the ministries of finance of Albania and the Republic of Moldova and at Bank Indonesia. UNCTAD also provided regular updates and new releases of DMFAS 6 to the 41 user institutions worldwide. The latest version greatly facilitates reporting, in particular to the QEDS and PSDS databases, as well as reporting in nominal and market value.

IV. Forward work programme of the Task Force

23. With the completion of the methodological work and the establishment of debt databases, the main activities in the 12-month work programme, agreed at the meeting of the Task Force in March 2016, are focused on the discussion and implementation of the medium-term strategies to address data gaps and improve country coverage for both the QEDS and the QPSD databases. The main vehicles for the implementation of the medium-term strategies are the External Debt Statistics Working Group and the Public Sector Debt Statistics Working Group, with strong reliance on enhanced inter-agency collaboration to attain the objectives, while reducing the burden on reporters.

24. The External Debt Statistics Working Group is already working on the tasks and developing appropriate timelines to attain the four objectives of the medium-term external debt statistics strategy for QEDS. The work programme also includes the dissemination of the QEDS metadata and the revamping of the Joint External Debt Hub website.

25. The medium-term strategy for the QPSD Database will focus on a limited number of countries, in addition to existing training assistance programmes, to encourage reporting and improve data quality. A country engagement group has already been established by the Commonwealth Secretariat, IMF, UNCTAD and the World Bank with a view to increasing the country coverage of the QPSD Database. The Public Sector Debt Statistics Working Group will continue working on common quarterly public sector debt templates to align the collection of public sector debt data. Eurostat and OECD will continue to focus on efforts among member countries to improve data quality.

V. Next meeting of the Task Force

26. The Task Force member organizations will hold the next meeting at the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany, on 21 and 22 March 2017.